IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently amended): A sling assembly, comprising:

a surgical sling configured to be implanted during a surgical sling procedure, and including first and second regions and a central portion;

a removable sheath assembly situated about the surgical sling, the removable sheath assembly comprising,

first and second upper sheaths, the first upper sheath configured to be situated about the first region of the surgical sling, and the second upper sheath configured to be situated about the second region of the surgical sling, and

a lower sheath, the lower sheath configured to be situated about the central portion of the surgical sling and to be in cooperative association with both the first and second upper sheaths,

wherein said lower sheath defines an interior portion that envelopes the central portion of the surgical sling and an exterior portion which has first and second faces, the first face configured to be placed adjacent to a patient's urethra, and the first face includes a kiss cut.

Claim 2 (Canceled).

Claim 3 (Canceled).

Claim 4 (Currently amended): A sling assembly, comprising:

a surgical sling configured to be implanted during a surgical sling procedure, and including first and second regions and a central portion;

a removable sheath assembly situated about the surgical sling, the removable sheath assembly comprising,

first and second upper sheaths, the first upper sheath configured to be situated about the first region of the surgical sling, and the second upper sheath configured to be situated about the second region of the surgical sling, and

a lower sheath, the lower sheath configured to be situated about the central portion of the surgical sling and to be in cooperative association with both the first and second upper sheaths

~~The sling assembly of claim 1~~, wherein the lower sheath defines an interior portion that envelopes the surgical sling and an exterior portion which has first and second faces, the first face configured to be placed adjacent to a patient's urethra, and the second face has a tab portion operatively associated therewith to assist in removal of the lower sheath from the sling.

Claim 5 (Currently amended): A sling assembly, comprising:

a surgical sling configured to be implanted during a surgical sling procedure, and including first and second regions and a central portion;

a removable sheath assembly situated about the surgical sling, the removable sheath assembly comprising,

first and second upper sheaths, the first upper sheath configured to be situated about the first region of the surgical sling, and the second upper sheath configured to be situated about the second region of the surgical sling, and

a lower sheath, the lower sheath configured to be situated about the central portion of the surgical sling and to be in cooperative association with both the first and second upper sheaths

~~The sling assembly of claim 1~~, wherein the lower sheath defines an interior portion that envelopes the surgical sling and an exterior portion which has first and second faces, the first face configured to be placed adjacent to a patient's urethra, and the sling assembly further comprises a removal assembly operatively associated with the lower sheath to assist in separating the lower sheath from the sling.

Claim 6 (Original): The sling assembly of claim 5, wherein the removal assembly includes a tube situated within the lower sheath and a suture which operatively associates the tube and a tab portion.

Claim 7 (Currently amended): A sling assembly, comprising:

a surgical sling configured to be implanted during a surgical sling procedure, and including first and second regions and a central portion;

a removable sheath assembly situated about the surgical sling, the removable sheath assembly comprising,

first and second upper sheaths, the first upper sheath configured to be situated about the first region of the surgical sling, and the second upper sheath configured to be situated about the second region of the surgical sling, and

a lower sheath, the lower sheath configured to be situated about the central portion of the surgical sling and to be in cooperative association with both the first and second upper sheaths

~~The sling assembly of claim 1~~, further comprising a dilator for creating or expanding a tissue passageway for placement of said sling.

Claims 8-10 (Canceled).

Claim 11 (Original): The sling assembly of claim 1, further comprising a spacer configured to be placed between the surgical sling and the patient's urethra.

Claim 12 (Original): The sling assembly of claim 1, wherein the sling is elastic.

Claim 13 (Original): A method for implanting a sling to treat urinary incontinence in a patient comprising the steps of:

providing a sling assembly including,

a surgical sling including first and second regions and a central portion, and

a removable sheath assembly including first and second upper sheaths and a lower sheath;

creating at least one vaginal incision;

creating at least one suprapubic incision;

positioning the sling assembly such that the central portion of the surgical sling and the lower sheath are placed underneath the patient's urethra;

removing the lower sheath via the at least one vaginal incision; and

removing the first and second upper sheaths via the at least one suprapubic incision.

Claim 14 (Previously presented): The method of claim 13, wherein the lower sheath includes a removal assembly and the step of removing the lower sheath includes the step of: pulling the removal assembly in order to remove the lower sheath from the sling.

Claim 15 (Previously presented): The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of: placing a spacer between the sling and the patient's urethra after the step of removing the lower sheath.

Claim 16 (Original): The method of claim 13, wherein the step of removing the lower sheath occurs prior to the step of removing the first and second upper sheaths.

Claim 17 (Original): The method of claim 13, wherein the step of removing the first and second upper sheaths occurs prior to the step of removing the lower sheath.

Claim 18 (Previously presented): The method of claim 13, further comprising the step of:

placing a spacer between the sling and the patient's urethra prior to either removing step.

Claim 19 (Previously presented): The method of claim 18, further comprising the step of:

removing the spacer from between the sling and the patient's urethra;

wherein the step of removing the first and second upper sheaths occurs prior to the step of removing the spacer and the step of removing the spacer occurs prior to removing the lower sheath.

Claim 20 (Original): A method for implanting a sling to treat urinary incontinence in a patient comprising the steps of:

providing a sling assembly including,

a surgical sling including first and second regions and a central portion,

a removable sheath assembly including first and second upper sheaths and a lower sheath, and

a spacer;

creating at least one vaginal incision;

creating at least one suprapubic incision;

positioning the sling assembly such that the central portion of the surgical sling and the lower sheath are placed underneath the patient's urethra;

removing the lower sheath via the at least one vaginal incision;

removing the first and second upper sheaths via the at least one suprapubic incision; and

removing the spacer.